

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CLAREMONT



Sikhism

An Introduction



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Sikh

The word 'Sikh' means a learner, a disciple, a seeker of truth, who follows the teachings of his preceptor, and live the life according to the tenets of the Guru (spiritual guide or preceptor).

The Supreme Being in the form of Guru guides a Sikh, leads him toward the religious pursuit and blesses him with the knowledge of spiritual upliftment.

Any human being who faithfully believes in One Immortal Being, Ten Gurus (from Guru Nanak Dev Ji to Guru Gobind Singh Ji), the Guru Granth Sahib, the utterances and teachings of the Ten Gurus, the baptism bequeathed by the Tenth Guru and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion, is a Sikh. He regards the ten Gurus as the effulgence of one light and one single entity.

Sikhism is a religion of action and human freedom. It is a religion original, distinct and revealed. It is the youngest religion of the world founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in 1469 AD. It is a practical religion - a faith of hope and optimism. Its ideals forms a large part of the more progressive elements in humanity today. It shows mankind how to lead a worthy and useful life in the world, which elevates it to the status of Universal World Faith.



Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1539)

The founder of Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev Ji propagated the equality of man. He opposed the distinctions of caste, insisted on living a house-holder's life. Guru Nanak travelled around 64,000 kilometres in 14 years around the world meeting people of different faith, color and creed. His mission was not to convert anyone but to inspire everyone to adopt a lifestyle based on truth. His message was simple with a universal appeal. Life regulated by the triple principle of meditation, work and social responsibility is, according to Sikhism, the means of an individual to fully realize his potentialities and to contribute towards the continuation and progress of society. These three principles are considered the three pillars or the foundation of Sikh thought, underlying the Sikh ethics and way of life. Finding that his end was approaching, Guru Nanak Sahib tested his disciples and passed Guruship onto the most worthy of them, Guru Angad Dev Ji.



Guru Angad Dev Ji (1504-1552)

Guru Angad Dev Ji popularized the Gurmukhi script and encouraged all to learn this script and read religious literature, thus breaking the Brahmin's monopoly of learning. He also set up religious centres where the principles of Sikhism could be propagated. He extended Langar - the free kitchen - and personally looked after the serving arrangements. He laid stress on the equality of man. He also opened a physical training centre for the Sikhs. He led a life of piety and service. Bypassing his sons, he nominated a true Sikh, Baba Amar Das Ji as his successor.



Guru Amar Das Ji (1479-1574)

Guru Amar Das Ji came to the succession by dint of his selfless service, at the age of 73. He paid serious attention to the propagation of Sikhism, created 22 dioceses (Manjis) and appointed a devout Sikh in charge of each region. He rejected the tradition of untouchability by constructing a Baoli in Goindwal. He started the tradition of meeting the Guru only after partaking food in the Langar. He opposed the rituals of Sati (self-immolating widow) and Parda (veil). He also got abolished Jazia - a tax imposed upon non-Muslims by



Emperor Akbar. In the tradition of Guru Nanak, he tested his disciples before nominating a successor, found his son-in-law Ram Das Ji, a devout and humble Sikh and installed him as the next Guru.

Guru Ram Das Ji (1534-1581)

Guru Ram Das Ji put missionary work on sound basis and sent Masands (preachers) to different parts of the country for propagating the message of Sikhism. He was a perfect example of humility and piety. He founded the city of Amritsar and started the excavation of Amrit Sarovar (Pool of Nectar). To describe the union of human soul with the Lord-Husband, in a symbolic way, he composed the Bani of Lava, which is recited at the time of Anand Karaj (marriage) of a Sikh. He nominated his youngest son, Arjan Dev Ji as the fifth Guru of the Sikhs.



Guru Arjan Dev Ji (1563-1606)

Guru Arjan Dev Ji developed Amritsar as a centre of industry and culture for the Sikhs. He constructed the Harimandar Sahib (Temple of God) with doors opened in four directions to preach the message of emergent equality and brotherhood. He gave the Sikhs their own scripture and compiled the Adi Granth in 1604 AD. He laid emphasis on acquiring virtues like equality, brotherhood and fearlessness. He was a man of people and wielded great influence. He laid the foundation of martyrdom in Sikhism by becoming the first martyr and being called 'Pioneer of Martyrs'. He nominated his

son, Hargobind Ji as the next Guru.



Guru Hargobind Ji (1595-1644)

Guru Hargobind Ji gave a new turn to the Sikh way of life by making them saint-soldiers. He himself was a great rider, hunter and swordsman, and also had a small army well trained. He fought and won four battles against Mughal armies. He carried two swords - one of spiritual power (Piri), and the other of temporal power (Miri). The use of sword as means of defence and justice



became popular among the Guru's followers. Facing Sri Harimandar Sahib in Amritsar, he constructed Sri Akal Takht (The Throne of the Timeless) in 1609 AD. He imbibed the spirit of high living, fearlessness and to fight against injustice among the Sikhs. He got 52 kings released from the fort of Gwalior and is remembered as the Great Liberator. He inspired Sikhs to present youth and weapons as offerings. He nominated his grand-son, Har Rai Ji as the next Guru.

Guru Har Rai Ji (1630-1661)

Guru Har Rai Ji was a man of peace and love, though he maintained a cavalry of 2200 horses. He was a man of great charity and generosity. He loved his devotees and helped them in times of need. He used to say, Poor man's mouth is Guru's golak (cash-box). For not maintaining the sanctity of Gurbani (Guru's Word), he excommunicated his elder son from Sikhism. He created awareness for conservation of environment and vegetation. He established a dispensary at Kiratpur, from where he sent medicine for the eldest son of Emperor Aurangzeb, when he was in distress. He nominated his younger son, Harkrishan Ji as the next Guru.



Guru Harkrishan Ji (1656-1664)

Guru Harkrishan Ji was called upon to assume the responsibility of leadership of the Sikh community at the tender age of five and he is known as the 'Child Prophet'. Spiritual enlightenment does not depend on age and God has the power to enlighten any person at any time, irrespective of age. In the history of human race, it will always remain unique that the spiritual light and leadership was imparted to someone

at such a young age. He instructed the Sikhs to serve others selflessly, with humility and not to be afraid of anyone. In order to fortify the Sikh religion, he issued the commandment 'Strengthen the congregation'. He had the utterance of teachings of 'Gita' from an illiterate water-carrier. He served the people of Delhi when the city was in the grip of small-pox epidemic. He gave solace to those in anguish. Knowing his last time to be near, he pointed to the devotees that the next Guru was 'Baba Bakale', the reference was to the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadar Ji.



Guru Tegh Bahadar Ji (1621-1675)

Guru Tegh Bahadar Ji undertook journeys for the propagation of Sikhism. He instructed the Sikhs, neither to be frightened nor to frighten anyone. He founded the city of Anandpur. He gave the unique martyrdom for upholding the right to freedom of religion in 1675 AD and is known as 'Anchor-sheet of Humanity'. He gave his life not for the preservation of Sikhism, but to protect the oppressed religion. Along with him, three Sikhs also sacrificed their lives. He nominated his son, Gobind Singh Ji, as the tenth Guru of the Sikhs.



Guru Gobind Singh Ji (1666-1708)

Guru Gobind Singh Ji inspired and imbibed the feeling of fearlessness, to fight against oppression and to become saint-soldiers. He fought and won many battles against hilly chieftains and Mughals, in the fight against tyranny and immorality. He created 'Khalsa' on the Baisakhi of 1699 AD by the way of 'Khande ki Pahul' (rites of double edged sword). He gave the unique martyrdom of his four sons and mother for the sake of upholding the cause of justice and freedom. He was a literary giant and a patron of poets. He ended the tradition of personal Gurudom and ordained the Sikhs to revere 'Granth Sahib' as their everlasting Guru.



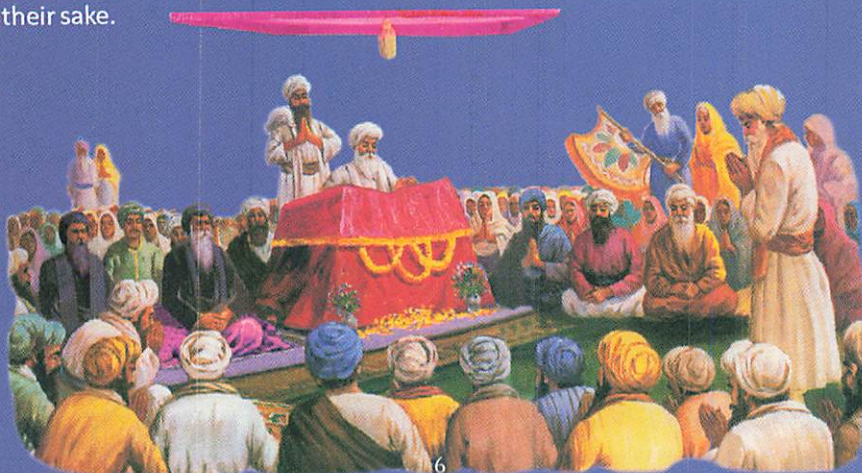
Guru Granth Sahib Ji

The Tenth Guru ordained the Sikhs to revere 'Granth Sahib' as their everlasting Guru. Guru Granth Sahib has been compiled by Guru Arjan Dev Ji in 1599-1604 at Ramsar, Amritsar. The final shape was given by Guru Gobind Singh Ji at Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Bhatinda district, Punjab in 1706 AD. In the year 1708, before his departure from this world, Guru Gobind Singh Ji gave Guruship to Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Granth Sahib is the only scripture in the annals of the world religions, which has been accepted as Guru. This is the only scripture which is compiled by one of the Prophets himself and consequently this scripture has been accepted without any ifs, buts and doubts whatsoever. In this scripture, the life sketches of the Prophets have not been presented as miracles. The thought process and philosophy presented here, while opening the doors of human salvation creates a picture of a person who treats the emancipation of humanity, life dedication to the Lord and the ultimate death as the same for him.

Guru Granth Sahib contains not only the Bani (teachings, composition) of Guru Sahibs but also of Hindu saints and Muslim holymen. This holy scripture contains words of many languages but their interpretation has been done in Gurmukhi script. This holy scripture contains Bani of 6 Guru Sahibs, 15 Bhagats (saints), 11 Bhats (bards) and 3 Gursikhs (devotees); thus making a total of 35 contributors.

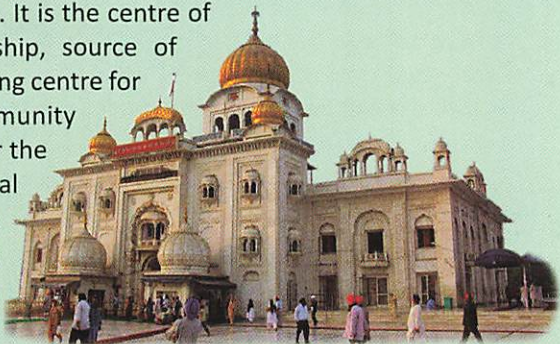
The ideology of the Sikh faith is based on the teaching enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. This scripture does not contain love stories or accounts of wars waged for selfish considerations. They contain sublime truths, the study of which elevate the reader spiritually, morally and socially. They teach the highest and the purest principle that serve to bind man to man and inspire the believer with an ambition to serve his fellow men, to sacrifice all and die for their sake.



Sikh Institutions

Gurdwara

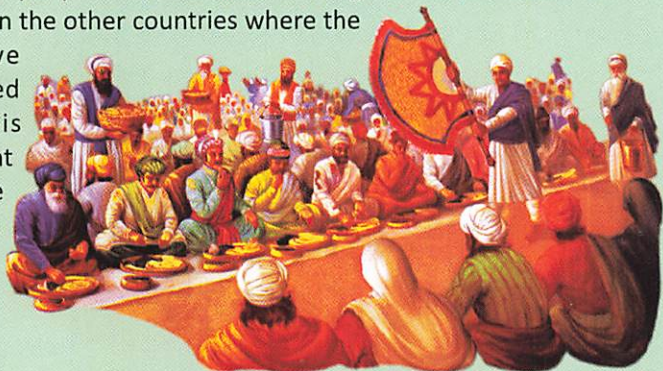
The Sikhs bow and pay reverence to Guru Granth Sahib in their place of worship called Gurdwara (door of the teacher). Gurdwara is the spring and source of propagation of Sikhism. It is the centre of Guru's precepts, place of worship, source of religious life and education, training centre for the social services and community deliberations. It is the nucleus for the Sikh way of life. The essential feature of a Gurdwara is the presiding presence in it of the Eternal Guru, Guru Granth Sahib, and with this presence, it becomes a Sanctum Sanatorium.



Gurdwara is a public place open to all devotees to pray individually or to assemble in congregation.

Langar (Community Kitchen)

Langar is the sitting together in a row to partake food from a common kitchen regardless of caste, creed, sex, age or social status. It helps in establishing an ideal society of universal brotherhood where every human could enjoy equal rights to live a life of equal status, honor and respect. This practice, to a large extent helps in removing the inferiority complex among the low caste people and the untouchables, and gives them a chance to mingle with the upper class people. Mughal Emperor Akbar, before meeting Guru Amar Das Ji observed the rule of this kitchen by partaking of food while sitting along side the common people. The institution of Langar is still prevalent not only in India but also in the other countries where the Sikh Diaspora have migrated and settled internationally. This institution has brought the Sikh faith to the forefront among the nations of the world, and is the pride of the Sikh people.



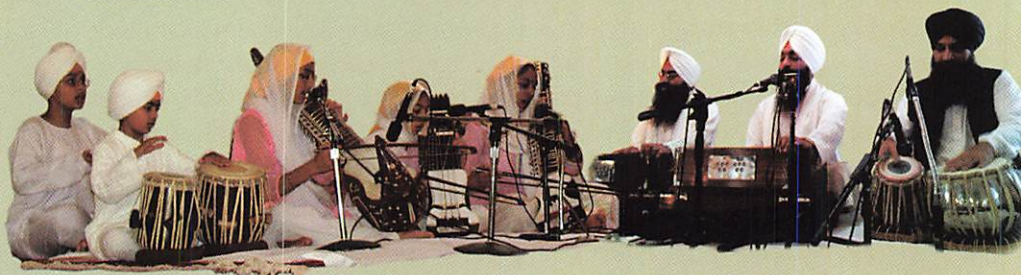
Sangat

Sangat stands for the body of men and women meeting religiously, especially in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. In current usage, it signifies an assembly of the devotees in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, where the praises of Almighty, Kirtan of Gurbani and contemplation upon the Name of God is done. It is applauded as a means of moral and spiritual uplift. It is as well a social unit which inculcates values of brotherhood, equality and Seva (service). There is no discrimination of caste, creed or high-low in the Sangat.



Sikh Worship - Kirtan

Kirtan is a specific feature of Sikh worship. It means singing the scriptural compositions in traditional musical measures. Kirtan is commonly accepted mode of rendering devotion to God by singing His praises. Sikh should listen to the Guru's teachings, make them the basis of one's life; this is the real listening to the Kirtan.



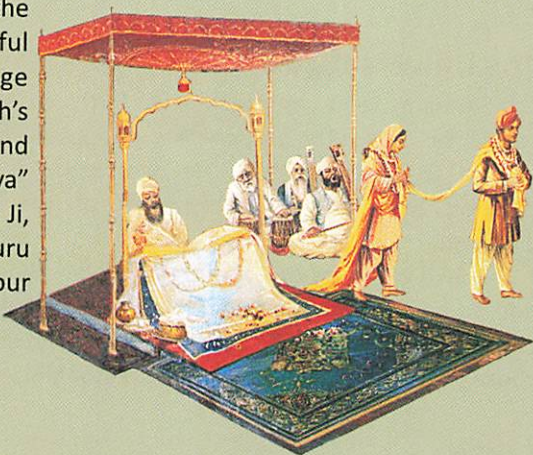
Sikh Prayer - Ardas

The word 'Ardas' means a petition, a memorial or an address to a superior authority. It is a petition of a soul before the Supreme Lord. To pray God for uninterrupted fulfillment of every task is a custom in Sikhism. It is the hearty prayer which Sikhs, individually or in congregation, recite morning and evening before launching off and after completion of any task. A Sikh should pray to God before launching off any task, so that one does not feel proud of oneself and acquire humility. When the mind bows before the All-Powerful Lord and is dependent on His blessings, the said prayer is accepted.



Sikh Marriage - Anand Karaj

Sikh marriage is called the Anand Karaj, literally Joyful Ceremony. Anand marriage rites should solemnize a Sikh's marriage. Sikh bridegroom and bride listen to the Bani of "Lava" composed by Guru Ram Das Ji, in the Divine Presence of Guru Granth Sahib and take four circumambulations around Guru Granth Sahib.



Amrit

One becomes a Singh after partaking Amrit from the Panj Piaras (The Five Beloved Ones). Amrit is a vow taken in the benign presence of Guru Granth Sahib in front of the Panj Piaras. This vow means that from now onwards, the person partaking Amrit would follow the principles of Gurmat (Guru's Thought). The tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji modified the initiation into the Order of Khalsa by the way of 'Khande Bate di Pahul'.



Characteristics of Sikhism

The Universal God

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith. It recognizes God as the only one. He who is not subject to time or space. He who is the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the Universe.

A Sikh worships only the One Timeless Being, and no god or goddess. Guru Granth Sahib states the simple facts that God created the universe and He only knows who created it, and when. The root cause of all the things, is in fact the Creator himself.



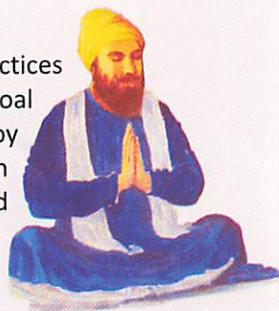
Ethics

Ethics and religion go together in Sikhism. The inculcation of moral qualities and the practice of virtue in everyday life is a vital step towards spiritual development. Qualities like honesty, compassion, generosity, patience, humility etc. can be acquired only by effort and perseverance. The lives of the Gurus show how they lived their lives according to the code of ethics.



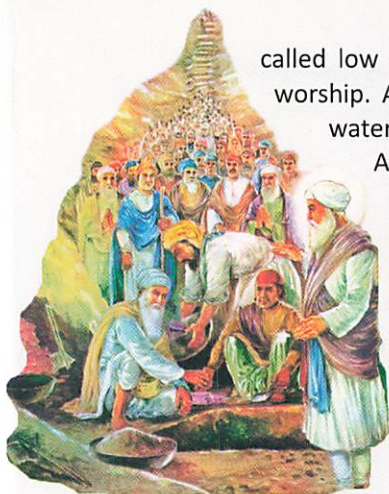
Rejection of Rituals

The Sikh religion rejects all rituals and routine practices like fasting and pilgrimage, omens and austerities. The goal of human life to merge with God is accomplished by following the teachings of the Guru, by meditation on the holy Name and performance of acts of service and charity.



Abolishing the Caste System

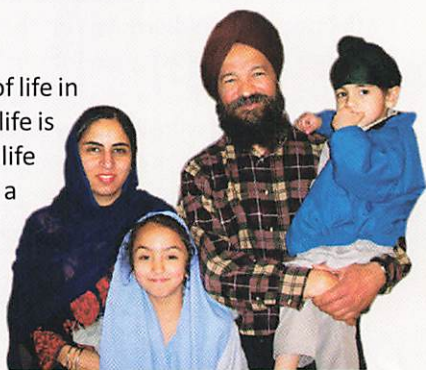
Sikhism rejects all distinctions of caste and creed. Guru Nanak realized that there could be no social revolution without a frontal attack on the caste system which had crippled human society to a large extent. The people of so-



called low caste were not allowed to enter the places of worship. Also, they were denied basic amenities such as water from the common well. The third Guru, Guru Amar Das Ji rejected the tradition of untouchability by constructing a Baoli (well with stairs) in Goindwal Sahib in Punjab for the benefit of all. The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji constructed Sri Harimandar Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar with four doors opened in each of the four directions signifying its accessibility to all irrespective of caste, color and creed. Its foundation was laid by a Muslim Sufi saint Sai Mian Mir in 1588 AD.

Household Way of Life

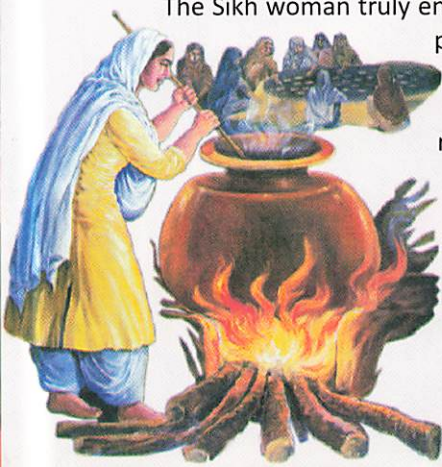
Sikh wisdom holds the household way of life in high esteem. It believes that normal family-life is no barrier to salvation. The Sikh way of life encourages Sikhs to live a family life like a lotus in a pond unaffected by the waves of lust and anger, sorrow and happiness, and always rising above the hardships and the pleasures of life.



Status of Women in Sikhism

Guru Nanak denounced the common view of woman as a condemned limb of society. He proclaimed her as an equal and important partner to man. Guru Amar Das strongly outlawed the evil practice of Sati (burning a widow on the pyre of her deceased husband) and encouraged widow remarriage. The system of dowry which had long been prevalent was denounced by the Gurus.

The Sikh woman truly enjoys a supreme status. She is allowed to take part in all religious, cultural and social activities. Sikhism is among the first major world religion to imply that women are equal to men.



Distinctive features of Sikhism

Modern Religion

Sikhism is a modern, logical and practical religion. It is possible to live detached in the midst of worldly ills and temptations. A devotee must live in the world and yet keep his head above the usual tensions and turmoil. He must be a soldier, scholar and saint for God.

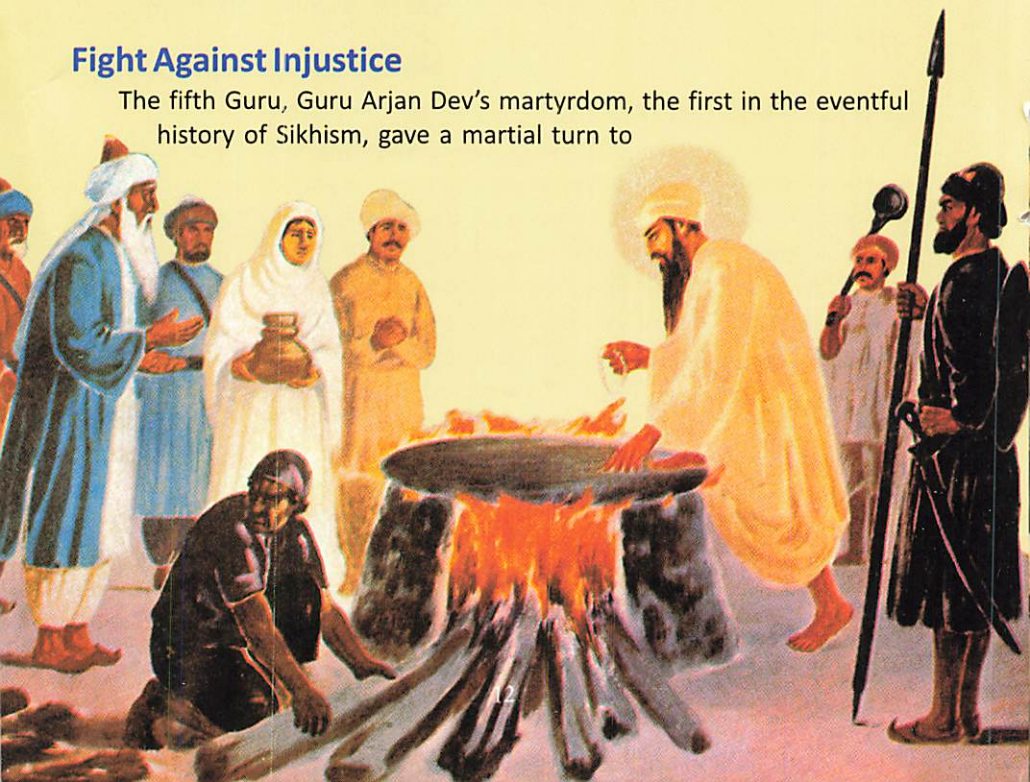


Saint-Soldier

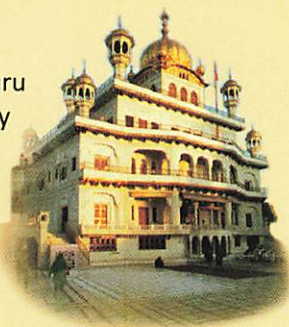
A Sikh is a saint-soldier, a person adorned with spiritual cum virtuous qualities and soldierly spirit. The Guru preached that religion and politics, though separate, have an interacting relationship, and should move hand in hand to serve the society. The concept of Saint-Soldier (Sant-Sipahi) is the same as that of Miri-Piri (combination of worldly strength with spiritual faith) as enunciated by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Ji. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh established Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of 1699. It was a unique step forward in the transformation of ordinary men into one casteless society of a brotherhood of humankind.

Fight Against Injustice

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom, the first in the eventful history of Sikhism, gave a martial turn to

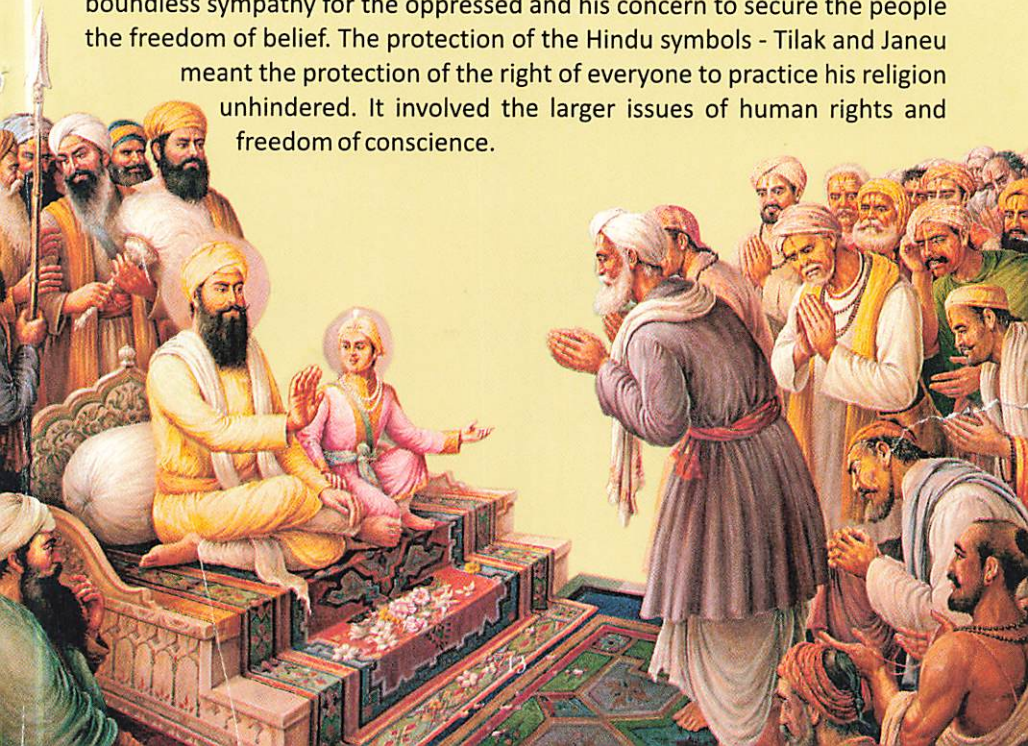


the community's orientation. His son and successor, Guru Hargobind, instead of donning the rosary and other saintly emblems wore a warrior's equipment and encouraged his followers to train as soldiers. He was compelled to wage wars with tyrant rulers and by his bravery and love, he won the hearts of many. He showed that, 'right is might' and good will ultimately triumph over evil. All the struggle was against tyranny and injustice. He was an heroic scourge of evil-doers and at the same time, a great philanthropist. He built the Akal Takht (the Throne of the Timeless) opposite the Harimandar Sahib in Amritsar. Here he dealt with secular and political matters. Thus, Sikh character was moulded for the purpose of self-defence and opposition to tyranny and injustice.



Freedom of Religion

The Gurus preached universal brotherhood and love for their fellow-men. The ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadar's unique martyrdom was for upholding the right to freedom of religion and he is known as Dharam di Chaddar (anchor-sheet of humanity). The Guru's message of freedom and fearlessness for the people was intended to give them the moral courage to stand up for their rights, and to maintain the dignity of ordinary people. Guru Tegh Bahadar's martyrdom was a superb act of self-giving. Implicit in it were his boundless sympathy for the oppressed and his concern to secure the people the freedom of belief. The protection of the Hindu symbols - Tilak and Janeu meant the protection of the right of everyone to practice his religion unhindered. It involved the larger issues of human rights and freedom of conscience.



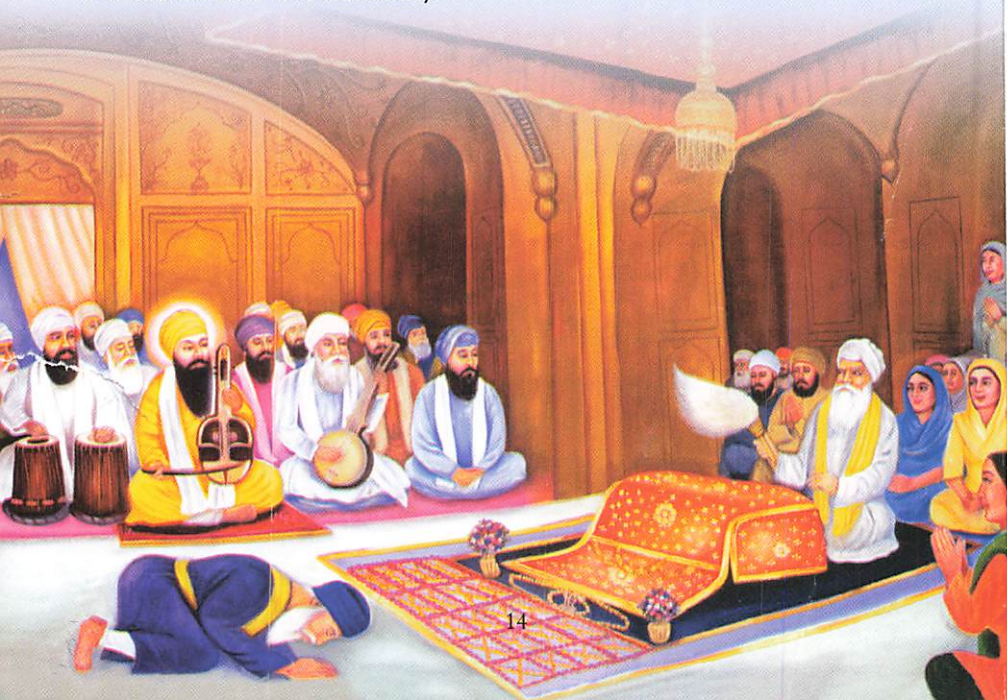
Sikh Way of Life

The Sikh faith is a simple way of living based on a 'live and let live' ideology. Unfortunately it is mostly misunderstood in the world as it has not been projected in the right light. The Sikh Gurus laid its foundation expressively and vividly on honest earning, meditation and service to humanity with a devoted mind. While living a simple life, one has to be a 'human being', meaning that one must be kind, humble, generous and benevolent. Sikh life requires one to be spiritual in order to achieve the destined goal of a true realization and union with the Master.

Sikhs has its own script called Gurmukhi, own calendar Nanakshahi and its own scripture Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhism has its own ceremonies for birth, baptism, marriage and death. It also has its own code of discipline - Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of Conduct and Conventions) and its own festivals and celebrations.

To keep them physically fit and strong, and to achieve excellence in the art of warfare, Sikhs practice Gatka, the martial art and a significant sports activity.

Another aspect of Sikhism is its concern for the good and the welfare of all people. Sikhs in their daily prayer Ardas, pray always for universal peace and the welfare of entire humanity.



Distinctive Identity

The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, at the time of creation of Khalsa, ordered everyone to wear five symbols (Kakars) to initiate as Khalsa. These are essential for every baptized Sikh. The set of these five symbols present the distinctive features of the Khalsa, which set them off from the followers of any other religious faith. These 'Kakars' are same for every Sikh.

Kes - Kes or unshorn hair is the stamp of the Guru. A Sikh believes them to be a treasure blessed upon by the Guru. One having Kes has been symbolized as a cosmic being, who has been described as having beautiful nose and unshorn hair, in Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh created Khalsa in the image of this cosmic being. The unshorn hair indicates living in Guru's Will and Sikh has to preserve the form blessed upon him by the Lord.



Kangha - Kangha or comb is to be kept in the hair to keep the hair clean while combing and saving them from matted condition. Matted hair symbolizes renunciation of the world, which is contrary to the Sikh tradition.



Kara - Kara, which adorned generally on the right wrist, is made of iron. Kara testimonies the fact that Sikh do not believe in superstitions or false beliefs and lives in the Guru's Will.



Kachhahera - Every Khalsa is enjoined to wear a Kachhahera, a pair of specially designed shorts, which symbolizes the high conduct of the individual wearing it. It is of tight fitting and covers the thighs up to the knees. Kachhahera stands to negate the concept of nudity prevalent in Indian asceticism. It restricts a Sikh to adhere to the social norms as a balanced social being.



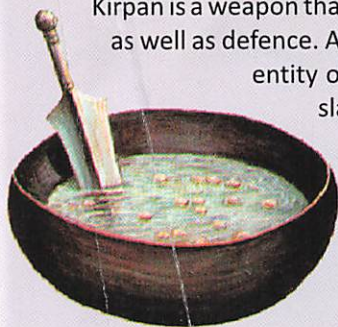
Kirpan - In the Sikh religion, Kirpan or sword is a weapon that cuts ignorance from its roots and one perceives the transcendental knowledge. As God is the one who destroys ignorance, thus Kirpan symbolizes God Himself. Besides this,



Kirpan is a weapon that can be used in both offence

as well as defence. Apart from this, it reveals the free

entity of the Sikhs and signifies that Sikhs cannot become slave of anyone. Its use must be for upholding righteousness and justice. Kirpan literally means a weapon used for self-esteem, but in the form of Kirpa or grace, not in the form of tyranny.



Different Aspects of Sikhism

Science and Sikhism :

Sikh beliefs have not been disproved by science in any form. Scientific facts support the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib.

Of all the world religious scriptures, Guru Granth Sahib alone states that there are innumerable worlds and universes other than our own. It has been stated by Guru Nanak Dev Ji, more than five hundred years ago. NASA's Kepler Mission has discovered 11 new planetary systems hosting 26 confirmed planets. The research is still going on and in the coming times, many more will be discovered.

Guru Granth Sahib states that God established the Earth, the sky and the air, the water of the oceans, fire and food. He created the Moon, the stars and the Sun, night and day and mountains; He blessed the trees with flowers and fruits. He created the demigods, human beings and the seven oceans; He established the three worlds (life in water, on land and in the air).

God created the gases and everything came from God's creation. For example, water (H_2O) came from the gases. When two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom combine, they form water. Life in the ocean, on land and in the air is based on water. Within all life, He has infused His Light, the soul, which is a part of God. God created the entire Universe including the Earth and life on the Earth.

Whatever is stated in Guru Granth Sahib more than five hundred years ago, is today being accepted and agreed upon by modern scientists.



Democracy in Sikhism

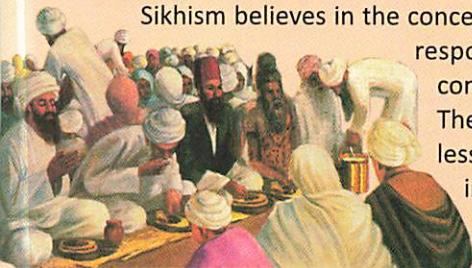
Sikhism promotes democracy and the belief that the welfare of people is best secured by their elected representatives. The principle rule of the Khalsa (Sikh nation) includes electing five individuals as the head of the state (Panj Piaras or Five Beloveds).



Also, the management of Gurdwaras is done by a statutory body comprising of elected representatives of the Sikhs. The administration of Golden Temple and other Sikh shrines in neighboring states is done by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), under the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925. It is also called the Parliament of the Sikhs. Gurdwaras in Delhi are administered by Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), which is also an elected body of the Sikhs. Apart from Gurdwaras, these bodies also run many educational institutions, medical and technical colleges, research centres, orphan homes, old age homes and other charitable institutions.

Socialism in Sikhism

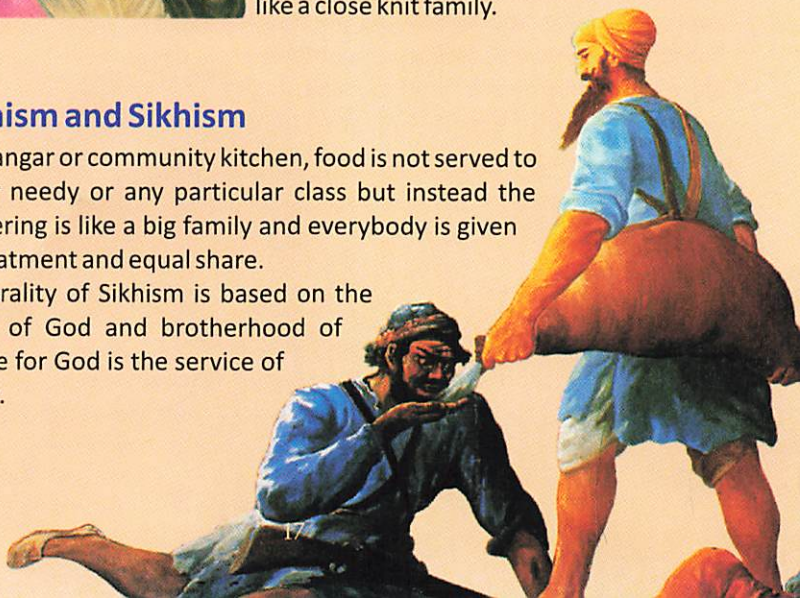
Sikhism believes in the concept of a socialistic pattern of society. Man's responsibility to society lies in taking his contribution to social welfare as a sacred duty. The gulf between the more fortunate and the less fortunate has to be bridged. The Guru instituted the Temple of Bread (Langar) to break the caste system and work together like a close knit family.



Communism and Sikhism

In the Langar or community kitchen, food is not served to the poor or needy or any particular class but instead the whole gathering is like a big family and everybody is given an equal treatment and equal share.

The morality of Sikhism is based on the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. Service for God is the service of His Creation.



Sikhism and Environment

Sikhism is very much concerned with the relationship between humanity and the environment. It believes that Waheguru (God) created the world as a place where every type of plant and animal could live so that all life could have the chance to prove that it was good enough to reach Mukti (liberation from the cycle of birth and death, reincarnation).

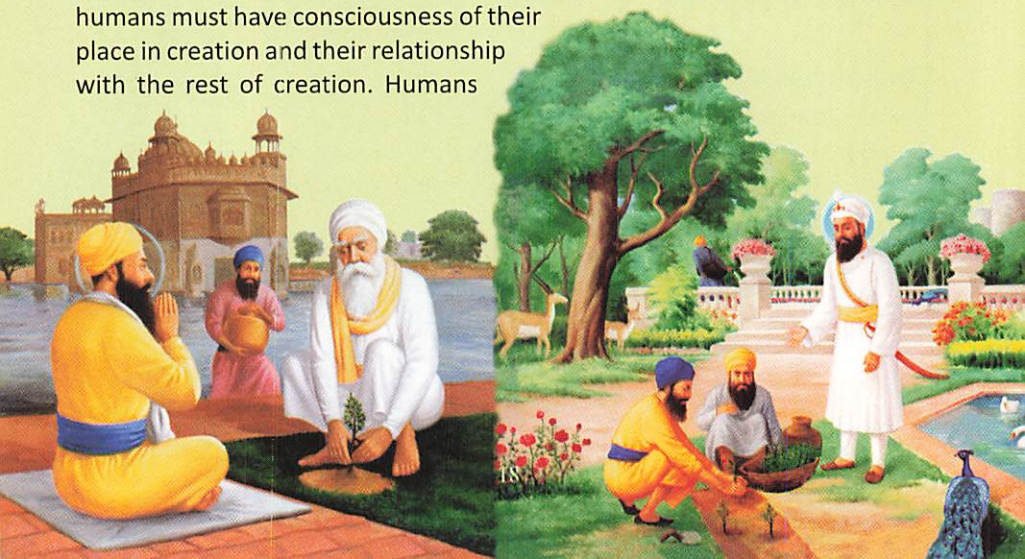
Sikhism teaches that the natural environment and the survival of all life forms are closely linked in the rhythm of nature. The lives of the Gurus are full of stories of their love and special relationship with their natural environment. The Gurus have strongly made us aware of our responsibility towards this earth.

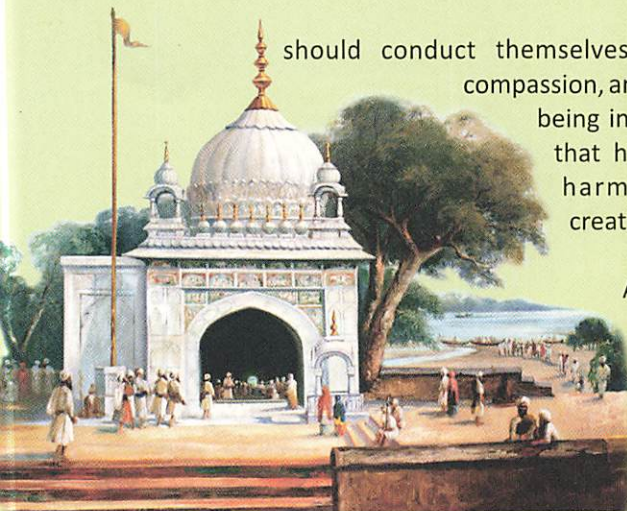
Guru Amar Das Ji constructed a Baoli at Goindwal, covering entire area with trees. Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh Guru developed Kiratpur Sahib as a town of parks and gardens. Located on the banks of tributary of the Sutlej, he planted flowers and fruit bearing trees all over the area. This created a salubrious environment, attracting beautiful birds to the town and turning it into an idyllic place to live in.

Following the teachings of their Gurus, Sikhs today are also aware about the effects of global warming, pollution and deforestation. Sikhs undertook to clean the polluted Kali Bein, a river which runs through Sultanpur, with the help of the people.

The highest temporal and spiritual body of the Sikhs, Sri Akal Takht made a public statement saying that caring for the environment is the "moral and religious duty" of a Sikh. It also stated "Wherever in the world you may be, your focus should now be on cleaning up of natural water resources rather than building gurdwaras." This is a welcome declaration of going green.

In Sikh beliefs, concern for the environment is part of an integrated approach to life and nature. As all creation has the same origin and end, humans must have consciousness of their place in creation and their relationship with the rest of creation. Humans





should conduct themselves through life with love, compassion, and justice. Becoming one and being in harmony with God implies that humans endeavor to live in harmony with all of God's creation.

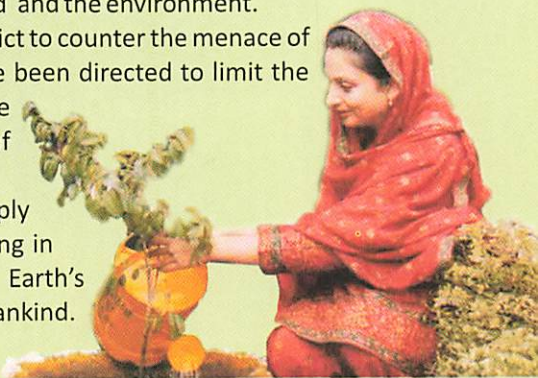
It is in this context that Akal Takht notified the Sikh community that acts of female foeticide were violative of Sikh principles and that offenders would be excommunicated.

The devotees who visit the Golden Temple in

Amritsar are also given a sapling of one of the varieties of trees mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib. They are asked to plant the sapling as a reminder to save the girl-child and the environment. The ingenious scheme 'Nanhi Chhaanh' (small shade), aims to put the force of faith behind the need to spread sensitivity about the girl-child and the environment.

The Akal Takht also issued an edict to counter the menace of noise pollution. All Gurdwaras have been directed to limit the voice of loudspeakers within the boundary wall of the place of worship.

Sikhism teaches people to apply the rule of moderation to everything in life. This includes the use of the Earth's resources for the benefit of humankind. Use of solar energy is being encouraged in Gurdwaras all over the world and also, energy saving lights have been installed at Sri Harimandar Sahib in Amritsar and many other Sikh shrines.



Human Rights and Sikh Ideology

The founder of Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev Ji was the first to acknowledge the basic fundamental rights of every person irrespective of color, caste, creed and gender. He recognized freedom of worship and of faith as a basic and a foremost birth right. He equally advocated the right to liberty of life, the freedom to preach and the freedom of speech; the right to possess property, the right to equal treatment in services without discrimination, and the right to political and economic freedom. All the Sikh Gurus stood for these principles despite having to go through very turbulent times that resulted in unjustified and unaccountable martyrdoms.

Sikhism also accepts the validity and co-existence of other faiths. The Sikh Gurus stood for the freedom of conscience, the right of an individual to practise his own religion, and defend his belief and way of life.

Sikhism believes in persuasion and not conversion. Those who wish to join the fold of Sikhism are expected to undergo a period of preparation and apprenticeship before being baptised. It is totally against conversion by coercion or unfair means.





Commandments of Sikhism

- God is, at all times, One.
- God alone is to be worshiped at all times.
- The Creator is present with all beings and in all situations.
- In being devoted to God Almighty, no one should incur any fear of any kind.
- No one should think of doing any evil act and cause any injury to anyone.
- All must earn their living out of self-exertion.
- In order to attain eternal bliss and pardon at the hands of God, all must practice forgiveness.
- It is essential to take food out of one's own effort. It is equally essential to share it with others.
- All men and women are to be treated as equals.
- Food is to be taken to sustain life and not to satisfy greed or lust.



Faith of the New Age

Modern writers have expressed their thoughts on Sikhism and Gurbani in an unbiased fashion, based on research and education. Their findings have given them a great understanding of the religion, and its place in the modern world.

Rev. H.L. Bradshaw :

Sikhism is a universal world faith, a message for all men. This is amply illustrated in the writings of the Gurus. Sikhs must cease to think of their faith as just another good religion and must begin to think in the terms of Sikhism being the religion for this New Age..... the religion preached by Guru Nanak is the faith of the New Age.

The religion of the Guru Granth is a universal and practical religion.... Due to the ancient prejudices of the Sikhs it could not spread in the world. The world needs today its message of peace and love.

E.A. Bittencourt :

The Sikh religion is truly the answer to the problems of the modern man. And it is the only living faith that gives healing outlook on life.

Arnold Toynbee writes in 'The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs' :

Mankind's religious future may be obscure; yet one can be foreseen. The living higher religions are going to influence each other more than ever before, in the days of increasing communications between all parts of the world and branches of the human race. In this coming religious debate, the Sikh religion and its scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, will have something special to say to the rest of the world.

Dr. W.O. Cole, writer of 'The Teachings of Guru Nanak' :

Remember the tenets of Guru Nanak, his concept oneness of God and Universal Brotherhood of man. If any community holds the key to the national integration of India, it is the Sikhs all the way.

Dorothy Field in her book 'The Sikh Religion' writes :

Pure Sikhism is far above dependence on Hindu rituals and is capable of a distinct position as a world religion so long as Sikhs maintain their distinctiveness.



Max Arthur Macauliffe writes in his book 'The Sikh Religion' :

Now there is here presented a religion totally unaffected by Semitic or Christian influences. Based on the concept of the unity of God, it rejected Hindu formalities and adopted an independent ethical system, ritual and standards which were totally opposed to the theological beliefs of Guru Nanak' age and country. As we hereafter, it would be difficult to point out a religion of greater originality or to more comprehensive ethical system.

Bertrand Rusell, a philosopher said :

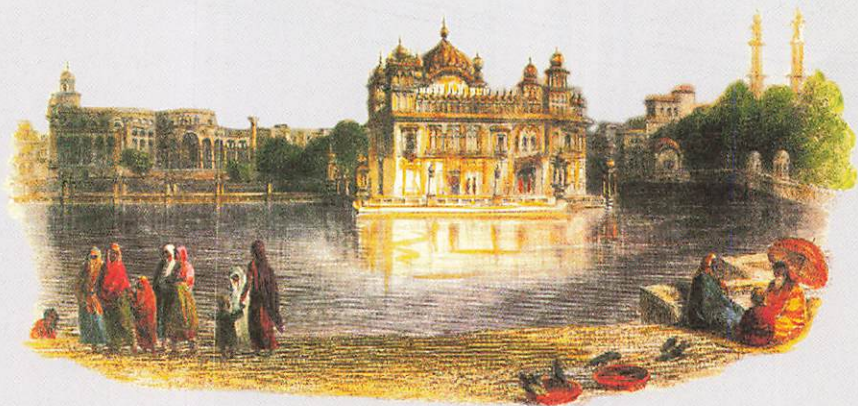
If some lucky men survive the onslaught of the third world war of atomic and hydrogen bombs, then the Sikh religion will be the only means of guiding them....

But the Sikhs have not brought out, in the broad daylight, the splendid doctrines of their religion which has come into existence for the benefit of the entire mankind. It is their greatest sin and Sikhs cannot be freed from it.

Swami Nitya Anand writes in his book 'Gur Gian' :

I, in the company of my guru, Brahma Nand Ji, went to Mathura....while on pilgrimage tour, we reached Punjab and there we met Swami Satya Nand Udasi. He explained the philosophy and religious practices of Nanak in such a way that Swami Brahma Nand Ji enjoyed a mystic lore. During the visit to the Golden Temple Amritsar, his soul was so much affected, that he became a devotee of the Guru. After spending sometime in Punjab he went to Haridwar. Though he was hail and hearty, one day I saw tears in his eyes. I asked the reason for that. He replied, "I sifted sand the whole of my life. The Truth was the House of Nanak. I have to take one more birth in that house only then I will attain Kalyan." After saying that the soul of his body left.





Epitome of Sikhism

Sri Harimandar Sahib

It literally means the House of God. It is the most famous sacred shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar, Punjab, designed and established by the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjan Dev Ji. He set the building with four doors opened in each of the four directions signifying its accessibility to all irrespective of caste, color and creed. In this sense, the structure of this sacred building presents the unique Sikh architecture. He installed 'Granth Sahib' here for the first time and revealed the significance of this place.

Harimandar Sahib, the epitome of Sikhism and centre of Sikh religious powers, is also called Darbar Sahib.

Knowing the significance of this place, Maharaja Ranjit Singh performed the service of gold plating on it, due to which it is also known as 'Golden Temple' to the English-speaking world.





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